



HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

Senate Bill 439

Higher Education - High Impact Economic Development Activities - Alterations

March 26, 2025

Favorable

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill 439. The bill alters the definition of "**high impact economic development activity (HIEDA)**" and requires the University System of Maryland (USM) and Board of Regents (BoR) to report information related to HIEDA. Senate Bill 439 couldn't be timelier. The BoR recently issued a preliminary report with proposed modifications to **BOR Policy VIII-15.0 — Policy on High Impact Economic Development Activities**.

The USM is comprised of twelve distinguished institutions, and three regional centers. These institutions are located throughout the state, from western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country's largest public online institution.

Prior to 2012, USM employees' were constrained in their ability to participate in technology transfer and commercialization activities that were an important part of the System's strategic plan and overall state objectives at that time. In 2012, the passage and enactment of [House Bill 442](#) established the Maryland Innovation Initiative within the Maryland Technology Development Corporation providing long-sought flexibility and relief from state ethics law and procurement practices to help facilitate and encourage tech transfer and commercialization activities resulting in a significant economic impact for the institution, the USM or the State of Maryland.

Senate Bill 439 calls for accounting of the amount of state or university funds being used on each HIEDA during the preceding year; the net benefit of each HIEDA; and whether the BoR believes each HIEDA is in the best interest of the state. The bill also clarifies that HIEDA does not include cost savings related to the reduction in the number of university employees and eliminates the procurement language in the existing law.

Senate Bill 439 "dovetails" as the BoR examines the plausibility of the economic activity of each HIEDA, reviews the organizational documents associated with the creation of any new entity, and reviews business plans and financial proformas. The BoR will focus on a review of any institutional plans for managing conflicts of interest that may be identified. It is important to note that the current policy provides for ongoing monitoring and oversight, including annual audits of financial statements.

The USM believes evaluation and transparency of HIEDA entities, and the extent to which the objectives of each have been achieved, is critical to promote the state's economic interest in job creation, commercialization, and entrepreneurship. The USM looks forward to a continued partnership and urges "favorable" on Senate Bill 439.



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